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# "Beatin' That Boy" and "Entering Messy Territories": A Review of Selected Recent Literature on Race, Racism, and Anti-Racism

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**"Beatin' That Boy" and  
"Entering Messy Territories": A Review of Selected  
Recent Literature on Race, Racism  
and Anti-Racism**

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Chicago,  
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**FRONTISPIECE**

"Why are whites so dim about the division between the races? What forces have lulled white America into assuming that blacks and whites were ever on the same page?...One answer is clear...our most powerful media images depict black-white sameness. They are feel-good images. They fail to connect with the texture of city life familiar to the 60 percent of black Americans who have not reached middle-class status: the life at the projects, or of the jobless, the homeless, and the illiterate. And they do not begin to reflect the deep conflicts of opinion between American blacks and whites at every class level."

("Sure, We're All Just One Big Happy Family," New  
York Times, Sunday, January 7, 1996)

"Lurking in the background of the Steve Forbes Presidential Campaign is an informal advisor of the candidate. His name is Thomas Ellis and from 1973 to 1977 he was a director of the Pioneer Fund, a New York Foundation that has spent half a century promoting the idea that whites are genetically superior to blacks...Among those who have received grants from the fund are J. Philippe Rushton, a crackpot professor who has equated small penises with heightened intelligence and Richard Lynn, a white supremacist professor of psychology who once speculated that Jews had gotten an evolutionary boost from 'intermittent persecutions which the more intelligent may have been able to foresee and escape.'"

("Affront to Black People," New York Times,  
Monday, February 12, 1996)

"1995 - Three Black American Marines seize a 12-year old Japanese



schoolgirl as she walks home. They force her into a rental car, bind her wrists and drive to a sugar cane field in northern Okinawa. There they repeatedly rape her and leave her bound, battered and semi-conscious. All the men belong to the Third Expeditionary Force of the US Marine Corps, nicknamed 'Tip of the Spear'. Numbering 18,000 men, 60 percent of them are less than age 21. All of them receive from the Marine Corps an orientation booklet upon their arrival in the Pacific. It reads: 'Marines here are the forwardmost defense against hostile aggression in the Pacific...when Marines aren't training hard, (fighting hard), they're playing hard...If your actions result in serious injury or death to a Japanese...you should offer compensation of up to \$1,000.'

(Guardian Weekly, January 7, 1996)

"...George Burdi is a racist from the future and he is impatient for it to arrive...His tiny empire, Resistance Records, Inc., includes a record label, a magazine, an Internet home page and a weekly electronic newsletter...He [Burdi] sings to a new Rahowa CD 'Racial Holy War', 'As I march into battle, my comrades I hail/Tonight the white race prevails/Death by our swords to the vile, alien hordes/Their very resistance shall fail.'"

("Method of a Neo-Nazi Mogul" New York Times, February 25, 1996)

### Introduction

In the pages which follow I have attempted to highlight and discuss some recent major books on race, racism and anti-racism. A full listing of books follows this brief comment. It is not an exhaustive survey nor a fully formed and informed critique. There is a gaping hole in the pages that follow: I have consciously limited myself to recent non-fiction. Omitted is the extraordinary body of fiction, literary criticism and poetry which is being produced today at a breath taking clip. Many of those producing this literature are African-American, Latina, Asian and Indian women. Thus, the writings of people like novelist Toni Morrison or critic Margo Jefferson, though metronomes for much of today's thinking, are not here. It also means that poets of all hues and from many corners like the recent collections of new poets Devorah Major and Julie Parson-



Nesbitt and older sages like Gwendolyn Brooks are not under consideration in this brief survey. I particularly regret this chasm for this river of fiction and poetry is both a repository and a mirror of what's happening daily and what people are thinking and feeling.

Another significant, yet conscious, limitation is the extent to which this review focuses solely on the Black-White axis. As the 1994 South End Press book, *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990's*, points out, far too little is known about the long continuum of voices and testimonials that has come from Native Americans, Latinos, Asians and others in the US. There is a plethora of literature, fiction and non-fiction about each ethnicity's struggle as well as abundant material on the interfacing of people of color in the United States. It is only for practical spacial and clarity reasons that I have excluded such worthy topics and restricted my work here to non-fiction writings on racism and anti-racism between Blacks and Whites.

Much of this project was worked on in public libraries throughout Chicago. Physically working on this project in public libraries assisted me in keeping a realistic perspective of some of the end results of the practices of racism in our society. I am grateful to several people I met who enriched my understanding as we talked about this undertaking. Anything helpful in my meanderings I dedicate to all of you, my sisters, brothers and colleagues, who are engaged daily so intensively that you are beyond the possibility for all this literary perusing. For those of you who see only pessimism, I would point out that the sheer number and depth of all the volumes on race and racism, class, gender, and homophobia that keep on coming in and of itself marks a long term process "to set the princes and principalities trembling..." This piece was written to be a tool for all those daily engaged in the countless small and big acts that constitute resistance against racism's growth and construction of a non-racist, non-sexist, non-heterosexist, loving alternative.

Race and race questions pervade and dominate all aspects of life in the United States. Throughout this piece I use the term "race" to mean a social construct developed and perpetuated by a dominant group so as to systematically categorize and exclude specific groups of people from the exercise of power. Race is and has always been a contested political act for in my view, race is inseparably linked to class and gender questions. Racism is an ideology or ideologies which may assume various forms but



serves the purpose of systematically legitimating acts of exclusion, domination, subordination, exploitation and/or terrorization.

I am not sharing these definitions as "gospel" but only as a common base for further understanding and reflection. There are multiple ways of viewing race and racism and there is a veritable mountain of literature purporting to define these concepts. My intent in this work is not to dwell on the definitions, rather to guide readers through a small sampling of the vast and growing body of works dealing with racial and race-related issues.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Three works which have been useful to me vis-a-vis the concept of race and racism are: 1) Krieger, Joel, *The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World*,; 2) Seymour-Smith, Charlotte, *Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology*,; and 3) Omi, Michael and Winant, Howard, *Racial Formation in the United States*.



**Racism and Anti-Racism Macarthur  
Peace Program Project  
Books Reviewed**

Boxill, Bernard R., *Blacks and Social Justice: Revised Edition*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 1992, 296pp.

D'Souza Dinesh, *The End of Racism: Principles for a Multiracial Society*. The Free Press, 1995, 724pp.

Gates, Jr., Henry Louis, *Loose Cannons: Notes of the Culture Wars*. Oxford University Press, 1992, 199pp.

Hooks, Bell, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*. Henry Holt and Company, 1995, 277pp.

Lerner, Michael and Cornell West, *Jews and Blacks: Let the Healing Begin*. Grosset/Putnam Books, 1995, 276pp.

Marable, Manning, *Beyond Black and White: Transforming African American Politics*. Verso, 1995, 236pp.

O'Reilly, Kenneth, *Nixon's Piano: Presidents and Racial Politics from Washington to Clinton*. The Free Press, 1995, 525pp.

Pieterse, Jan Nederveen, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*. Yale University Press, 1992, 259pp.

Roediger, David, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics and Working Class History*. Verso, 1994, 201pp.

Smith, Michael and Joe Feagin, eds. *The Bubbling Cauldron: Race Ethnicity and the Urban Crisis*. University of Minnesota Press, 1995, 359pp.

Steinberg, Stephen, *Turning Back: The Retreat from Racial Justice in American Thought and Policy*. Beacon Press, 1995, 276pp.

Williams, Patricia, *The Rooster's Egg: On the Persistence of Prejudice*. Harvard University Press, 1995, 262pp.



## I

In an essay written in late 1994, entitled "Beloved Community: A World Without Racism", bell hooks shared the following observation about one aspect - a critical one - of current race relations in the United States, "More than ever before in our history, black Americans are succumbing to and internalizing the racist assumption that there can be no meaningful bonds of intimacy between blacks and whites."<sup>2</sup>

In some senses bell hooks' observation was neither new nor novel. Alexis de Tocqueville commented on the racial division in America more than one and a half centuries ago. Gunnar Myrdal, the Swedish sociologist noted the US's rising racial tensions in his 1944 study, *An American Dilemma*. The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (the Kerner Commission) concluded about US racial polarization in 1968, "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black and one white, separate and unequal." And more recently, in 1992, revised in 1994, political scientist Andrew Hacker (interestingly, yet another White male) wrote the popular, often quoted, *Two Nations*.

Various Black commentators and analysts have been making the same point for years. Ranging from Frederick Douglass to W.E.B. DuBois, Oliver Cox and Malcolm X, numerous writings coming from Black and other oppressed US groups have long conveyed the tragic patterns of exploitation, separation and pain existing in the USA.

bell hooks is joining distinguished company with her *Killing Rage* and other writings. The uniqueness of what she brings, perhaps, is her perspective as a Black woman academic. Even in that respect she is not a solitary voice for her writings are part of a swelling stream of writings coming from an impressive group of women of color ranging from better known figures like Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, Sandra Cisneros and Maxine Kingston to less well-known contributors like Bonnie Dill, Barbara Ransby, and Karin Aguilar-San Juan.

bell hooks' observation about the polarization in US society today strikes me as one of the most impressive understatements I've encountered. It fails to capture the separation, bitterness and hate which today characterizes much of the Black community's feelings about "Whites". It also seems, as much of her writing

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<sup>2</sup> hooks, bell, p. 269.



does, to put the responsibility for righting the situation on the shoulders of Black people. There is too little examination of the nature and character of the growing rage and hostility emanating from today's White Americans, especially urban, working class males.

Today in the USA 86% of White people live in neighborhoods that are less than one percent African Americans. Now in the United States we can talk about hate before/after the October 16, 1995 Million Man March and before/after the OJ Simpson verdict earlier the same month. These two events, the reactions to them and the reactions to the reactions encapsulate the fundamental schisms and antagonisms governing most Black-White relations in the USA today. This is not to argue that there are not other breaches in US society. Clearly, for instance, in a city like Chicago a group of Japanese tourists cannot leisurely stroll by Taylor Street's bare-chested macho men in quest of an Italian lemonade (shades of Vincent Shin in Detroit). And equally, the tension is unmistakable when one watches Black people shopping in the Arab-owned mom and pop stores on Chicago's southwest side. But the strongest line of hate is along the so-called Black-White racial line. As Ghanaian observer, Kofi Buenor Hadjor puts it in his new and very readable book, *Another America: The Politics of Race and Blame*:

Although this conflict may involve New York Jews or Los Angeles Koreans or Mexican immigrants, I believe that the basic, underlying divide is along Black and White lines. Blacks are not the only group to suffer racial discrimination and prejudice. Latinos and Asians have their own grim tales to tell. However, I believe that the Black/White divide is the keystone of racial conflicts in the United States, around which other intergroup tensions revolve.<sup>3</sup>

There are few communication points left between most Blacks and most Whites. And we live in a time when fewer and fewer people are willing to communicate with their own families, let alone strangers. All people in the USA live increasingly isolated lives. And it is in this context that the prophets of hate like Farrakhan and Buchanan are becoming more and more popular.

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<sup>3</sup> Hadjor, Kofi, p. X.



Despite being the most influential, if not powerful, nation in the world, there is a noticeable insularity about the US. This isolation factor in questions of race and racism in the United States is one which could bear more reflection. I think, for instance, that the African-American struggle has become isolated not only from other struggles within the USA but as well from various international struggles to which there have been deep connections historically. (Much of the link to the South African situation these days has been more symbolic than substantive as Senator Paul Simon has frequently, and I think, accurately, observed.) Today, unlike the sixties and the early eighties both the strategies for ending racially oppressive situations and the formulations of racism are forged in circumstances of isolation and provincialism. For the victims of racial oppression this has specific negative consequences - a theme to which I will return later when I discuss how anti-racism is thought about and formulated.

Some aspects of the current state of affairs are traceable to a specific and, I think, very "American" historic behavior. "Race" and "racism" are rarely talked about by the majority group in the United States. Despite the omnipresent nature of the two phenomena, they are not voluntarily discussed by most in the majority white population. If they come up in conversation, it is under specific conditions: 1) they are discussed in a safe and non-threatening way, often in coded language, e.g., a discussion of "those welfare people"; 2) they are brought up in the presence of a person of color as a concession to that person of color (often whether the person of color raises them or not); 3) conversations which take place among exclusive groups so the discussion can be conducted in a more at ease fashion, with pejorative terms which show the real feelings the person has (i.e., talks where the language will not be checked or challenged by anyone).

Then, of course, there are those who do not discuss "race" and "racism" because they are beyond such things. They are the "I've never known prejudice" group or the group that doesn't need to examine and reflect about race matters because they've "done all that" and/or they "know about all that stuff".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> By way of contrast, look at South African society where a pervasive race order has also prevailed. Whites of all political persuasions are and have always been eager to discuss their race



John Powell, former national director of the ACLU, now at the University of Minnesota Law School, where he directs the Institute on Race and Poverty, believes it critical to find ways to talk about race. He recently observed in an article called "Talking Race":

Whites are also uncomfortable with minorities directly focusing on race and racial hierarchy. Often there is a belief that minorities place inappropriate importance on race. As one white person put it, minorities focusing on race reminds her of adolescence. 'It's just something they have to grow out of...' Direct discussion of race is not easily tolerated. The apparent solution is to not talk about race, but for the sensible racial others to transcend race.<sup>5</sup>

One of the books devoted exclusively to talking race in this panoramic sweep of race, racism and anti-racism literature is the Michael Lerner and Cornel West book, *Jews and Blacks: Let the Healing Begin*. *Jews and Blacks* is essentially the transcript of a conversation. It is rich with information and has some insightful sections, as in the discussion about Farrakhan. However, the book is rather unbalanced in that too much of the dialogue is structured around Cornel West answering Michael Lerner's concerns about Black attitudes toward Jews. I found my constant wish to learn more about the roots of Jewish attitudes towards Blacks unfulfilled. Repeatedly, as in the chapter "Jewish Racism and Black Anti-Semitism", the reader does not receive from Michael Lerner the historical and analytical responses that are provided by Cornel West. Despite the

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problems. And there is a long tradition of extensive White writing on race of which, Gerhart Schuttes's *What Racists Believe* and June Goodman and Ben Schiff's *Heart of Whiteness*, are two fine recent examples.

<sup>5</sup> Powell, John, "Talking Race: An Essay", *Hungry Mind Review*, 31, Fall, 1994, p. 15. This issue of this St. Paul Minnesota magazine is devoted to race. Besides some excellent book reviews, over half of the magazine is devoted to the fascinating responses which many of their readers gave to a race questionnaire in a previous issue.



limitations, though, *Jews and Blacks* should be read and made available, especially to Black and Jewish young people. At points, the dialogue gets past race, racism and anti-Semitism to begin dissecting the underlying dynamics of power. And the chapter entitled, "Strategies for Reconciliation and Healing" contains some valuable insights about urban America and some concrete ideas for continuing the conversation between Blacks and Jews.<sup>6</sup> These contributions provide starting blocks for the conversations we need to have throughout the USA.

Two texts I reviewed address some of the standard paradigms employed to describe the situation of Blacks in the USA specifically and more generally, US race relations. The older of the two books, *Blacks and Social Justice* (1992) looks at a basic issue that generation after generation has had to resolve, that is, whether oppressed Blacks should march the path toward segregation or go the more liberal path toward integration. It summarizes and critiques the writings of Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois and Martin Delaney. The second book, *Turning Back: The Retreat from Racial Justice in American Thought and Policy* (1995), wholly eclipses the first in addressing the standard of the 50's theories coming from Nathan Glazer, Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal. *Turning Back* is both an excellent history of how American social science treated the Negro problem and a powerful treatise on some of the interests involved in shaping how Myrdal's classic book, *An American Dilemma*, could be both written and presented. *Turning Back* points out that while *An American Dilemma* represented a

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<sup>6</sup> Dr. West's description of the desperation and disillusionment in urban Black Americans in this chapter is one of the illuminating parts of the book and is worth citing:

More than that, it's the sense that the Black working poor are undergoing such devastating levels of disintegration. The sense of hopelessness is so deep, and the sense of futurelessness so pervasive that there is a widespread gangsterization of much of urban Black America. That gangsterization is currently so deeply saturated in some Black communities that it's taken on a life and logic of its own, with the cold-hearted, mean-spirited disposition, the paranoia, and the distrust each of the other, (*Blacks and Jews*, p. 253).



major paradigm shift from the earlier so called "scientific" scholarship,<sup>7</sup> it was simultaneously constructing a new edifice that would put a moral bandage on racism but never address the institutional and systemic pillars of racism. *Turning Back's* author, sociologist Stephen Steinberg, then goes on to share some of the reasoning that went into the Carnegie Corporation's 1935 selecting Myrdal to conduct their pivotal study on race. With impressive detail Steinberg situates the Carnegie Corporation's decision in the growing fears and tensions around the migration of poor Black tenant farmers to the North and the Harlem Riot of 1935. He points out that:

...from the point of view of the Carnegie Corporation, Myrdal was the ideal person to head a study of the Negro in America. His liberal credentials would lend credibility to the study at a time of liberal ascendancy in American politics and increased militancy from within the black community. Besides, "fresh ideas" were needed to make sense of the breakdown of the old racial order, and to provide an intellectual foundation for the reconstituted racial order that was emerging. Yet it was clear that Myrdal would remain within safe political bounds, and would not roil the political waters as Frazier had done in his report on the Harlem Riot... (emphasis original)<sup>8</sup>

Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*, argues Steinberg in his book has enduring aspects. The first is in Myrdal's argument that there is a fundamentally moral notion of equality inherent in the American body politic that will resolve America's race dilemma. Secondly, and integrally linked to the first notion, is a belief that the solutions lie not in addressing the structures and

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<sup>7</sup> An excellent example of the earlier scholarship, (and a foretaste of the 1990's *Bell Curve*) is the 1910 *Encyclopedia Britannica's* definition of the Negro which includes, among other things, the finding that, "mentally the negro is inferior to the white...in the former the growth of the brain is...arrested by the premature closing at the cranial sutures and lateral pressure on the frontal bone."

<sup>8</sup> Steinberg, Stephen, p. 36.



institutions of the American state but rather in delving into the individual and his or her psychological sources of "prejudice" and "bigotry".

Manning Marable's *Beyond Black and White: Transforming African American Politics*, especially his essay "The Prism of Race", jolted me from both Steinberg's *Turning Back* book and Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*. It was not just the intellectual breadth of Marable's writings that made such an impression. It was also Marable's ability to clearly and continuously bridge the theoretical and the practical. He goes easily from a theoretical and historical analysis to simply and clearly describing the daily realities and complexities of what we know as "race" today. Mr. Marable eloquently reminds the reader (and I think this is a book written largely for Black readers or for others already engaged in anti-racism activities) that racism is most painful in little acts: the pain of hesitating to enter a store knowing that your every move will be carefully watched; the hurt involved when a White woman, alone with you in the elevator, all but hugs the wall trying to avoid any contact with you - an act that joins the (her)stories of racism, sexism and violence in the USA. You say to yourself, seeking rationality and objectivity, "but these are things done to White people, too." Women are frightened of any man in an elevator. But for the Black person, it happens again and again. And then you notice it doesn't happen when you're in an all Black setting or a Mexican-American setting or another country!! Manning points out that:

Each of these incidents, no matter how small, constructs the logic for the prism of race for the oppressed. We witness clear unambiguous changes of behavior or language by whites towards us in public and private situations and we code or interpret such changes as "racial". These minor actions reflect a structure of power, privilege and violence which most blacks can never forget.<sup>9</sup>

Marable, Professor of History and Director of the Institute for Research in African-American Studies at Columbia University, is a prolific writer with literally hundreds of books, articles and news columns accredited to him. Now 45 years old but gravely

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<sup>9</sup> Marable, Manning, p. 7.



ill, he says that his main task is to "understand the living reality of race and the collective struggle to overcome the burden of discrimination."

Much of Marable's *Beyond Black and White*, like his other books, is about linkages. His writings describe the relationship between racism, sexism and heterosexism. He writes to link different oppressed groupings and to help dismantle narrow racial identity politics. One of his great strengths is his rejection of the old categories and boxes and his demand that social change in general and transformative politics must be approached with new paint brushes and fresh paint. In *Beyond Black and White* he lays out an unambiguous blueprint for doing anti-racism work and for coalitional politics. He writes:

By the year 2000 one-third of the total US population will consist of people of color. Within seventy years roughly half of America's entire population will be Latin, American Indian, Pacific American, Arab American and African-American...Our ability to transcend racial chauvinism and inter-ethnic hatred and the old definitions of "race", to recognize the class commonalities and joint social-justice interests of all groups in the restructuring of this nation's economy and social order, will be the key to constructing a nonracist democracy, transcending ancient walls of white violence, corporate power and class privilege.<sup>10</sup>

Manning Marable's writings and books are straight forwardly and unabashedly radical. Unlike his colleague, Cornel West and others writing from a combined spiritual/liberation theology/Black Left/post modernist point of view (Michael Dyson comes to mind), Marable's writings are direct and to the point (occasionally over simplified). On September 21, 1995, his column in one of Chicago's Black newspapers, the *Chicago Defender*, challenged a fundamental concept behind Farrakhan's Million Man March. He wrote:

The fundamental problem which advocates of the March must address is its agenda and message...All of us certainly favor the development of strong Black

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<sup>10</sup> IBID, p. 201-202.



extended families, communities and institutions but self-help and individual effort, while important, don't fully address the structures and power which perpetuate Black oppression.<sup>11</sup>

He continued in the same article to criticize the March's position on African American women saying that "to tell the sisters to stay home and pray while brothers march seems anachronistic and reactionary."

Just as Manning Marable constantly points out the relationship between racism, sexism, homophobia and class exploitation, another of our authors is continuously pointing to the changing nature of racism. In her book *The Rooster's Egg: On the Persistence of Prejudice*, Columbia University law professor, Patricia Williams notes at one point:

As more blacks, women, gays, Hispanics, Jews, Muslims and wheel-chair bound people have entered the workplace, gotten tenure in universities, and risen to political office...the new generation of fire hosing tomato-throwers have shifted their aim and their tactics...

...Most of all the moral currency of the civil rights movement's vocabulary has been under attack.

"Integration" itself has been transferred in meaning, now used glowingly by former segregationists like Jesse Helms and Strom Thurmond - and rejected by many former civil rights activists - as having come to mean a form of assimilation that demands self-erasure rather than engagement of black contributions and experience.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the linking of issues and pointing out how racism, like chameleons, can have an ever changing form or appearance, another meaningful contribution from Patricia Williams' book is the critique which she provides of the culture's role in society generally and particularly, how culture takes place in the US society. "Moving 'past race'," she points

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<sup>11</sup> Marable Manning "The Million Man March, Part II" *Chicago Defender*, Thursday, September 21, 1995. p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Williams, Patricia, p. 25.



out, "requires an unprecedented national reflectiveness about every aspect of our collective lives, and about complexities rooted in the extraordinary variety of both biological and cultural heredity that 'Black/white' compresses." Pictures, stories, words, language, she argues in her excellent chapter "Black-Power Dream Barbie",<sup>13</sup> are critical conveyors of a nation's past and a nation's future. "It is these cultural nodes that contain the possibility of loving beyond the divisiveness of race and gender issues to forge genuine community."<sup>14</sup> "Far too often," Ms. Williams observes, "we are too deaf and too blind within the enclaves of our own limiting stereotypes, myths and romantic notions to really bridge into the lives of the others; to connect with the objectified 'them'."

Many of Patricia Williams passages leave a lasting imprint with the reader. Of all the many writers considered in this review, she is the most impressive. At one point, for instance, she uses the term "a distribution of sadness" to convey the pain, trauma, and violence surrounding the racism, sexism and homophobia hanging around all of us like a dense fog in the USA. Surely, it's a distribution of sadness that pervades the story of the Black Marines raping the 12 year old Japanese girl cited in the beginning of this review. Again and again in *Rooster's Egg*, through story-telling and straight commentary, Patricia Williams shares poignant observations which help dissect the various problems pervading American society. They are not always new insights but they are woven together in fresh ways. Her writing is not always the easiest but once understood there is an enduring quality about it, as below:

The hard work of listening across boundaries is not

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<sup>13</sup> In part, a response to the Robert Kaplan "Coming Anarchy" piece in the February 94 *Atlantic Monthly*.

<sup>14</sup> Another good work available only the last year in an English language edition is Jan Pietesse's *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*. It powerfully explores the use of cultural images as sources of racial ordering and power. The truly comprehensive writing covering the whole arena of cultural production and its links to politics is that being done currently by Paul Gilroy, Robin Kelley, Rob Nixon and Anthony Appiah.



always perceived as necessary for those cushioned within the invisible privileges of racial and other hierarchies of power. But the failure to incorporate a sense of precarious connection as part of our lives is a way of dehistoricizing, suppressing from view, and if we are not careful, ultimately obliterating.<sup>15</sup>

This passage is characteristic of the multi-layered richness of Ms. Williams' analysis.

## II

During the post-military-phase-of-the-war days when a Negro is asked what occurs when he visits with white friends, he is likely to chuckle and drily reply, "Oh, we beat that boy," meaning to belabor in polite conversation what is commonly called the "Negro Problem...for the race issue has been like a stave driven into the American system of values, a stave so deeply imbedded in the American ethos as to render America a nation of ethical schizophrenics...it is practically impossible for the white American to think of sex, of economics, his children or womenfolk, or of sweeping socio-political changes without summoning into consciousness fear-flecked images of black men..."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Williams, Patricia, p. 200.

<sup>16</sup> Ellison, Ralph, "Beating that Boy," *The New Republic*, October 22, 1945 as quoted in Callahan, John, ed., *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, p. 145. Though not really under review in this survey, I urge any and all to read Ralph Ellison's various pieces, the most popular of which is *The Invisible Man*. As a young graduate student at Columbia University in 1967, I was honored to sit next to Mr. Ellison as he debated Harold Cruse, author of *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, about whether Paul Robeson was in fact a leading figure in the Black community! Arguing the affirmative, Ellison, with the same kind of



Opening this section with Ralph Ellison's dry comment is not contradictory to the beginning of this paper where I said race was not taken up by many whites in this country. For race is talked about in the US even when it's silent. It is important to emphasize my belief that race has been omnipresent in US history, and perhaps the major underlying force behind twentieth century global history. Of course, saying this is not a novel position since people like W.E.B. DuBois observed decades ago that "the problem of the twentieth century was the problem of the color line." More must be said. The potency of race as a force should not be diminished. I join recent analysts like E. San Juan, Jr. in his recent book and Barbara Ransby in her writings in the *Race and Class* magazine who argue that it is important to not confuse race and ethnicity (see introduction).

In his 1992 book entitled, *Racial Formations/Critical Transformations: Articulations of Power in Ethnic and Racial Studies in the United States*, E. San Juan, Jr. states:

...It is presupposed by my principal argument...that race, not ethnicity, is the explanatory and hermeneutic concept needed to describe the heterogeneous terrain of conflicting cultures in the United States. Race, not ethnicity, articulates with class and gender to generate the effects of power in all its multiple protean forms. Ethnicity theory elides power relations, conjuring an illusory state of parity among bargaining agents.

In the next passage San Juan, Jr. argues why in the case of the United States it is crucial to profile race as the crucial factor. He writes:

What orients this disjunction of ethnicity and race in this work is the following fundamental insight. From its inception, the United States has been distinguished

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historical grasp and intellectual and political maturity that are in his *Collected Essays*, gently but firmly rebutted Cruse's early Clarence Thomas-type lies throughout the evening. It was clear that night that Ellison, unlike Cruse, wanted to share with us but listen to us as well.



as a sociohistorical formation with specific racial dynamics. It was contoured by the expulsion of American Indian nations from their homelands and their genocidal suppression, an inaugural and recursive phenomenon followed by the enslavement of millions of Africans, the dispossession of Mexicans, the subjection of Asians, and so on. The historical origin of the United States as a nation-state, traditionally defined by the revolutionary Enlightenment principles enunciated by the "Founding Fathers" cannot be understood without this genocidal foundation. (emphasis mine)<sup>17</sup>

E. San Juan, Jr.'s thoughts on the dominance of race and racial questions in the historical development of the United States are not new. Japanese American historian Ronald Takaki in multiple books and articles for many years has not merely highlighted the primacy of race questions in US history, he has also demonstrated, using the Gramscian concept of cultural hegemony, how the racial experiences of America's several racial peoples are related to one another. In his book *Iron Cages* Takaki attempts to look at how what American Whites did to one racial group had direct consequences for others and was directly related to all the political, social and economic institutions spawned by the total US cultural order.

But there is something very important and often overlooked by all of those who, seeing race as a dominant force, nonetheless see it as a constructed force. Too often the zeal to renounce the old (and some emerging, e.g. the "Bell Curvites") apostles of the biological and scientific basis of race has resulted in minimizing the real and grim impact which "race" yet has on countless lives. Race, while conceptually invalid, nevertheless has tremendous meaning and impact on the real lives of people.

Allow me to expand somewhat on this notion for it is important. Recently a number of conservatives encouraged by the notoriety of Dinesh D'Souza and others, have been arguing that racism is no longer a force in US society. *Time* magazine columnist Lance Morrow in the December 5, 1994 issue went even further. Proposing that no African-Americans employ the terms

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<sup>17</sup> Both passages are taken from San Juan, Jr.'s *Racial Formations/Critical Transformations*, p. 5.



"racism" or "racist", he declared that the words themselves are a "feckless indulgence, corrosive to blacks and Whites alike and to relations between them." This trend from the conservative community illustrates, it seems to me, how easily the factual observation that race has no scientific meaning can be used to obscure and distort the political meaning which race yet retains in shaping and governing relations in the United States. Though it may not be valid as a scientific measure, race remains very valid as a socio-economic and political measure.

Manning Marable in *Beyond Black and White*, the "Prism of Race" chapter, has shared some observations which are amongst the most illuminating thoughts of all the writings I examined. I think Marable shows clearly in the passage below the relationship between class and race. I therefore share portions of Dr. Marable's reasoning at some length:

...the problem with the prism of race is that it simultaneously clarifies and distorts social reality. It both illuminates and obscures, creating false dichotomies and distinctions between people where none really exists. The constructive identity of race, the conceptual framework which the oppressed create to interpret their experiences of inequality and discrimination, often clouds the concrete reality of class, and blurs the actual structure of power and privilege. It creates tensions between oppressed groups which share common class interests, but which may have different physical appearances or colors. For example, on the recent debates concerning undocumented immigrants, a narrow racial perspective could convince African-Americans that they should be opposed to the civil rights and employment opportunities of Mexican Americans, Central Americans, and other Latin people. We could see Latinos as potential competitors in the labor market rather than as allies in a struggle against corporate capital and conservatives within the political establishment. On affirmative action, a strict racist outlook might view the interests of lower-class and working-class whites as directly conflicting with programs which could increase opportunities for blacks and other people of color. The racial prism creates an illusion that "race" is permanent and finite, but in reality, "race" is a



complex expression of unequal relations which are dynamic and ever-changing. The dialectics of racial thinking pushes black people toward the logic of "us" versus "them," rather than a formulation which cuts across the perceived boundaries of color."<sup>18</sup>

What Marable is saying (and many life experiences I have had in this world compel me to agree) is that despite what Wilson, D'Souza and others are saying, "race" and "racism" are not in decline. How race is used has been changed but I and my children are still ineluctably forced to view the world and our lives through the moldy leg-irons of race.

In a 1986 book called *Apartheid in Our Living Rooms: US Foreign Policy and South Africa*, I recounted how in 1965 when Ronald Reagan was running for governor he visited then Massachusetts Attorney General Edward Brooke, an African-American. During a luncheon speech on the emergent African nations Reagan joked, "when they (Africans) have a man for lunch, they really have him for lunch."<sup>19</sup>

Little did I realize then how finding one example of President Ronald Reagan's personal racism provided a preliminary gauge of the depth of racism throughout all the structures of US governance. A new book by historian Kenneth O'Reilly at the University of Alaska provides deepened understanding. It traces presidential attitudes toward and involvement with racism from the nation's earliest debates over slavery to the Clinton administration's capitulations and flip-flops over Black presidential appointments and affirmative action. In the opening chapter of the book *Nixon's Piano: Presidents and Racial Politics From Washington to Clinton*, the author summarily states:

To write of the forty-two chief executives and their deeds and dreams on matters of race yields few profiles

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<sup>18</sup> Marable, Manning, pp. 8-9.

<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, twenty eight years later, Senator Ernest Hollings, Democrat from South Carolina would employ the same racist imagery commenting on African delegates at the 1993 GATT conference. Characterizing the delegates the Senator said, "Rather than eating each other, they just come up and get a good square meal in Geneva." (*Washington Post*, February 5, 1994)



in courage and a great many profiles of men who agonized and analyzed only in search of more perfect ways to protect slavery or Jim Crow or a life expectancy that in the mid-1990s is lower in Harlem than Bangladesh. The story of the presidency and the politics of race is thus largely a story of choices made to acquiesce in, preserve, and adapt the original intent of 1787 to modern times.<sup>20</sup>

The revealing account in *Nixon's Piano* of how upset John Kennedy became after the June 1963 shooting at Medgar Evers reveals once again the pre-eminence of race and racial matters in the United States. O'Reilly's research found that President John F. Kennedy, after hearing so much about Evers tragic death, complained in irritation to House Speaker Carl Albert, "Christ you know, it's like they shoot this guy in Mississippi, I mean it's just in everything. I mean, this has become everything." Then choosing not to attend Evers burial at D.C.'s Arlington cemetery, Kennedy instead sent a limousine for the funeral and arranged that the family would get a White House tour and some PT-109 souvenirs.

Racial discourse, racial thinking and much of the ideology of White supremacy has penetrated deep into the psyches and beings of people of color in the USA. bell hooks' essay, "Beyond Black Only" in her book *Killing Rage* is a signal effort to describe (and even explain) the difficulties for people of color in the USA to effectively join forces. Her essay doesn't merely say that people of color cannot forge solidarity bonds with one another. It goes further to say that "non-white, non-black groups, Native, Asian, Hispanic-Americans, conscientiously seek white approval and reward as a way of distancing themselves from blackness which is viewed as the bottom of society's totem pole." Using most multiculturalism programs and how they are conducted as an example, Ms. Hooks continues on saying, in essence, that the crumbs from the table (the rewards):

coupled with internalized racist assumptions lead non-black people of color to deny the way racism victimizes them even as they actively work to disassociate

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<sup>20</sup> O'Reilly, Kenneth, p. 12.



themselves from black people.<sup>21</sup>

This "will to disassociate," says the author, is a gesture of racism. Finally, in this compact but powerful essay, the author points out that Black people join the non-Black people of color in collaborating with existing systems of oppression and exploitation when they internalize White supremacist attitudes and values toward non-Black people of color, especially immigrants.

Hooks' essay and other recent books, such as Williams and Hadjor point to the fact that race and racial matters in the USA do not just interface between various so-called minority racial groupings on one hand and the dominant White group on the other. Race also interfaces in sometimes even more sobering manners between and amongst various people of color groupings. Indeed, a note of encouragement is the rapidly emerging literature by people of color which describes and depicts the necessity of new bonds of solidarity being welded for and by people of color. An interesting additional trend being woven into this multi-layered dynamic is the incorporation of issues and values traditionally viewed as belonging to White women into the organizing begun done by people of color. Meanwhile, gender issues themselves are being given some fresh perspectives with the burgeoning growth of analysis and activism by women of color.<sup>22</sup>

The last several years have seen an explosion of literature on race and race-related matters throughout the world but especially in the USA. Some of this tidal wave have been books and publications targeted to the general public. Within this genre are included Studs Terkel's *Race: How Blacks and Whites Think and Feel About the American Obsession*, Alex Kotlowitz's *There Are No Children Here*, Lise Funderburg's *Black, White, Other: Biracial Americans Talk About Race and Identity* and South African Mark Mathabane's *Love in Black and White*. They are largely works that are the result of personal or deep cathartic experiences like a young, White college male being exposed for the first time to inner city life in the housing projects.

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<sup>21</sup> hooks, bell, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Herein, for example, the reader is referred to Ruth Frankenberg's book, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*, discussed later in this review.



Then there is the popularized but substantive "documentary-like" best seller. This genre includes works like Andrew Hacker's *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate Hostile Unequal* and all of Jonathan Kozol's books, *Death at an Early Age*, *Savage Inequalities* and the latest, *Amazing Grace*. It is not that these books have no value. They meet an important need of educating people who are concerned but uninformed. But they are characterized by a certain tedium and superficiality and too often, are edited and published to meet consumer tastes and profit sheets rather than as substantive contributions toward discussing and resolving the serious, enduring and complex problems centered around race.

A third category of books - one which is happily expanding geometrically - is that grouping which has largely been the subject of this review. They are the "cutting edge" books and studies. They are the more serious treatments. Their primary characteristic is that they are largely written for and available to the largely middle class, university trained, White, voting sector of the US population. A work like Doug Massey and Nancy Denton's *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* with all the rich data and detail it contains does not get to bookcases or kitchen tables in inner-city Cabrini-Green or Henry Horner Homes. And adjacent churches and schools unfortunately are not using *American Apartheid* in reading clubs and study groups. Maybe in the near future volunteers and solidarity shipments of "cutting edge" books will begin pouring into housing projects on Chicago's West and South sides as they pour into Nicaragua and Cuba.

Despite this bleak opening note there are illuminating new themes, new paradigms and fresh voices in this category. There is contention and argumentation. There is sharp disagreement. And there is constant probing of the subject matter.

Leading the way in this genre are the social constructionists, i.e., those who have sought to counter the argument that race was naturally or genetically determined with an analysis that was race as a socially constructed phenomenon. One of the most informed and persuasive thinkers in this school is historian Barbara Fields and her essay "Ideology and Race in American History" in the 1982 collection, *Religion, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward* which remains in my opinion one of the seminal pieces of writing on racism. Manning Marable, Cornel West, Patricia Williams, Henry Gates, bell hooks, Bonnie Dill, Barbara Ransby, the progressively



oriented thinkers all have drawn upon the thoughts of Barbara Fields, educated at the University College Dar Es Salaam and trained at Harvard and Yale.<sup>23</sup>

A more recent part of the cutting edge group is a number of largely White scholars whose historical investigations have been re-working old notions and tired ideas about White people and White supremacy as an ideology. This group includes books such as David Roediger's duo, *The Wages of Whiteness* and *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness*, as well as Theodore Allen's *Invention of the White Race*. Stephen Steinberg's *Turning Back*, discussed earlier, follows in this tradition. Ruth Frankenberg's *White Women, Race Matters* exemplifies the tradition and shows, as we see in her opening paragraph quoted below, a refreshing attempt to locate race and racism in the real world of power and relationships not just as free floating, abstract concepts:

My argument in this book is that race shapes white women's lives. In the same way that both men's and women's lives are shaped by their gender, and that both heterosexual and lesbian women's experiences in the world are marked by their sexuality, white people and people of color live racially structured lives. In other words, any system of differentiation shapes those on whom it bestows privilege as well as those it oppresses. White people are "raced," just as men are "gendered." And in a social context where white people have too often viewed themselves as nonracial or racially neutral, it is crucial to look at the "racialness" of white experience. Through life history interviews, the book examines white women's places in the racial structure of the United States at the end of the twentieth century and views white women's lives as sites both for the reproduction of racism and for

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<sup>23</sup> In turn, Ms. Fields would understandably credit people like Walter Rodney and Marjorie and Simon Mbilinyi for helping her, as Manning Marable says in *Beyond Black and White*, "to stand in the transformationist tradition of Fanny Lou Hamer, Paul Robeson, C.L.R. James, Walter Rodney and Amilcar Cabral." (see p. 214)



challenges to it.<sup>24</sup>

### III

The real issue in America today is not whether Cornel West can get a taxi. If he dresses well he is less likely to be mistaken for a criminal, and if one cab passes him by, another will come along to take him to the dining room at the Harvard faculty club. The supreme challenge faced by African Americans is the one that Booker T. Washington outlined almost a century ago: the mission of building the civilizational resources of a people whose culture is frequently unsuited to the requirements of the modern world.<sup>25</sup>

There is another paradigm which is attempting to assert itself. In most respects it is not new. It is a re-visiting of some old and empty ideas. A short hand description of this grouping would be, "the blame-the victim" school. Some of its major figures are: Linda Chavez author of *Out of the Barrio: Towards a New Politics of Hispanic Assimilation* (1991), Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray with *The Bell Curve* (1994), Seymour Itzkoff and his *Decline of Intelligence in America* (1995), Shelby Steele with *The Content of Our Character* (1990), Thomas Sowell with *Race and Culture: A World View* (1994) and Dinesh D'Souza with his book, *The End of Racism: Principles for a Multiracial Society* (1995).

All these authors and books represent a change in emphasis from arguments that identified societal and institutional forces and failings e.g., racism as the source of the problem to arguments that place the blame on the victims themselves be they culturally deprived, Blacks (and others), genetically inferior Blacks (and others) or morally impoverished Blacks (and others). More importantly, and new all these efforts reflect the extent to

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<sup>24</sup> Frankenberg, Ruth, introduction.

<sup>25</sup> D'souza, Dinesh, p. 554.



which the intellectual and political climate for discussing race, racism and related matters has shifted to the Right. Indeed, some commentators argue that the Sowell, Steeles and D'Souzas of today dominate current discussions about race. Like McDonald's signs, the ideas of the racist Right are permeating and molding especially, perhaps, key decision makers and the thinking of Americans at all levels. Earlier this year a former head of late night programming at CBS, John Pike, told his cast members of a CBS late night pilot:

Research shows there are three reasons why African-Americans are an important part of the late night demographic: first, they have no place to go in the morning - no jobs - so they can stay up as late as they like; second they can't follow hour long drama shows - no attention span - so sketches are perfect for them; third, network TV is free.<sup>26</sup>

Ghanaian author Kofi Hadjor, discussed earlier, makes a persuasive and cogent argument that "there has been an important shift of emphasis in the discourse about the Black poor in America over the last 25 to 30 years." When one considers not only growing popular notions about "welfare queens" and "jungle bunnies" but also the growing appeal which sentiments about "walling out 'the Joses'" and beating up the gooks have, the following observations of Hadjor assume a compelling logic and accuracy:

In this way, much of the race discourse today can be seen as an old-fashioned exercise in blaming the poor and the powerless for the nation's difficulties, and so letting the powerful off the hook. What is new is that this prejudice is now wrapped up in the sociological jargon of the "underclass" debate and, as such, is given far greater credence by liberal critics.

The hidden reality is that the basic cause of rising inter-group tensions in the United States has little to do with cultural or behavioral factors. It rests upon the failure of the American social and economic systems to integrate millions of Blacks and

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<sup>26</sup> *Extra*, March/April 1996.



other minorities into a successful order.<sup>27</sup>

A White friend of mine, both a psychologist and pastor, read Dinesh D'Souza's *End of Racism* as I was reading it. Discussing it one day, she kept saying, "It was seductive. It's so tightly argued, it seems so well-researched. If one doesn't keep questioning at every paragraph D'Souza's presuppositions, one can be drawn down the path toward acceptance of his overall conclusion that racism is no longer a problem." She assessed D'Souza well. Like the quotation from his book, *The End of Racism* which opened this section, there is a smoothness and slickness to the writings of the conservative school that is very appealing. Unlike the progressives and the Left, the conservatives have mastered the art of making the answers seem simple. This is especially useful when you address a people so scared about everything in their lives and so confused because it's all so difficult and complicated.

Simultaneously, the liberal to Left forces (including the unions, the churches and the community organizations who often seem the least adroit at even acknowledging racial issues as racial issues)<sup>28</sup> have decisively failed to engage racial ordering as a comprehensive, major and increasingly global threat.

#### IV

Howard Winant, like Barbara Fields, one of the pioneers in contending with race and "race matters," succinctly sketched the depth and texture of the challenge facing those who would like to replace the racial eiderdown with new trappings when he wrote in

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<sup>27</sup> Hadjor, Kofi Buenor, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Note, for example, how few foundations will fund work on racism qua racism. There is a specific articulation to be found of the culture and structure of race in every US institution. And it is key to problems in this country. Why are US foundations so reluctant to identify and engage with race and racism?



1994:

Racial hegemony is being reconstituted as overall hegemony; unfortunately, it is the right that is largely responsible for this trend and that stands to benefit the most from it. The task now is to provide an alternative, emancipatory account of the virtues of racial difference and racial diversity, and to reconstruct the links between the fate of racially defined minorities and the fate of U.S. society as a whole.<sup>29</sup>

This final section is dedicated to addressing the big questions. How do we do it? How do we get beyond race? How does a system of structural racism embedded as deeply as in this United States get dismantled? Is non-racialism the goal?

This is a new and utterly challenging situation from the epic of the 60's, the Civil Rights Movement and the 70's with the Vietnam War. One of the more striking aspects about the Feagin and Smith collection, *The Bubbling Cauldron*, is that the fundamental perception that race and racial phenomena need to be seen globally is not in contention. All the contributors to *Bubbling Cauldron* share an understanding that key global developments like the globalization of labor markets and transnational migration are fundamentally altering and shaping race relations not only in the USA but worldwide.

The trans-territorialization of production and radical restructuring of labor due to revolutionary new technologies have meant that more than 43 million jobs have been erased in the USA since 1979.<sup>30</sup> This in turn has led to acute job insecurity, splintering of families, altered workplaces and devastating patterns of destroying people's sense of self-esteem. It is no surprise that some of the very places undergoing the most transformation and attendant stress are the site(s) of some of the most rampant employee-on-employee violence. Job loss and insecurity have in turn contributed mightily to increasing the racial and class tensions in contemporary US society making

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<sup>29</sup> Winant, Howard, p. 36.

<sup>30</sup> Vehitelle, Louis, "On the Battlefields of Business, Millions of Casualties," *New York Times*, March 3, 1996, p. 1.



places like urban postal services with alienated, largely Black and minority, work forces racial tinderboxes waiting to explode.

Robin Broad and John Cavanagh recently observed that the wealth of 358 of the world's wealthiest individuals is equivalent to the combined wealth of the bottom 45% (2.5 billion people) of the world's population.<sup>31</sup> The correlation of this global income gap with racial categories is nearly 100%. The people of color nations, Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific, the so-called "Third World," are largely poor and most of the world's poorest nations are dark skinned people.<sup>32</sup>

Work on race, racism and anti-racism should be situated within the structured real world not within fictitious hypothetical situations. In response to the globalized dynamic of racism there should be globalized and historical-rooted anti-racism work.

Clearly, there is a need for all the people in the US to begin seriously engaging race and racial matters. It is a time for Whites in the USA to begin to understand race and its role in US history in a new way. It is time for Whites to battle against race as a source of their privilege and race a source of inequities and oppression. This should be taken up, as the Lutheran Church in America purports to do, as a question of faith.

Race in the United States, we are reminded by Manning Marable, has also been an identity of survival and affirmation. Particularly in the Black nationalist tradition, as opposed to the integrationist tradition, (the former being overwhelmingly more popular with young Black people today) racial identity has

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<sup>31</sup> Brood, Robin and Cavanagh, John, "Don't Neglect the Impoverished South", *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1995-96, p. 26.

<sup>32</sup> In a 1995 book, *The Color of Hunger*, edited by David L. L. Shields, the following point sums up the global relationship between hunger, poverty, race and gender:

it is an indisputable reality that people of color are disproportionately represented among the hungry, both on a global scale and in the United States. So are women. It is certainly no coincidence that both groups are frequent targets of prejudice and discrimination, (p. 50).



become the elixir. Nothing sums up the religious embrace of Blackness as much as the T-shirt slogan popular with many young Black people that reads, "It's a Black thing. You wouldn't understand."

Marable and most of the authors reviewed in this survey would say that racial identity politics is not a sufficient response. It may be a necessary part of the response but it cannot be sufficient to construct a new America "beyond traditional racial categories and racial oppression." Some of Henry Gates writing serves as an excellent example of this message. While Gates writes as a strong "race" man, he also clearly sees himself and African-American studies contributing to a much larger pool of human thought. A constant theme in much of this writing - one that hard line nationalists find utterly disgusting (hence their labeling of Gates as a *New York Times* Zionist puppet) - is "blackness without blood". In his powerful essay "What's in a Name?" - part of his *Notes on the Culture Wars* - he states:

the idea that African-American culture is exclusively a thing apart, separate from the whole, having no influence on the space and shaping of American culture is a racist fiction...For us, and for the students that we train, the complex meaning of blackness is a vision of America, a refracted image in the American looking-glass.

Most of the authors I've examined assert that transformative visionary politics can only be done if a multi-dimensional approach is followed, one that involves struggling concurrently against racism, sexism, homophobia and classism.

I began this journey citing bell hooks saying essentially that more and more Black Americans don't believe that there can be meaningful, close relationships with Whites. I wish to return to that point as I conclude. I completely agree with Ms. Hooks' point but I even more strongly endorse her observation in the following sentence where she says:

It is fascinating to explore why it is that black people trapped in the worst situation of racial oppression - enslavement - had the foresight to see that it would be disempowering for them to lose sight of the capacity of white people to transform themselves



and divest of white supremacy, even as many black folks today who in no way suffer such extreme racist oppression and exploitation are convinced that white people will not repudiate racism.<sup>33</sup>

Probably as a result of my engagement in and with Southern Africa being almost equal to my involvements in the US, I have long been struck with the capacity of the Southern African people to pursue political visions that transcend race.

During the years of the armed national independence struggles White people per se were not defined as the enemy. This remains the case today in South Africa despite occasional rhetorical gestures like the slogan "one settler, one bullet" that come from identifiably minority segments within the over-all population. And some of the White hate sentiment emanated from infiltrating elements of the South African security forces.

All over Southern Africa I have always been impressed with how people suffering such pain and loss could yet have such a breadth in their vision. In Southern Africa there is a clarity about the goal of struggle that I find missing here. When Nelson Mandela, Agostinho Neto, Oliver Tambo, Eduardo Mondlane and Amilcar Cabral in Africa articulated that they were struggling for non-racism<sup>34</sup> and non-sexism it formed part of a coherent,

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<sup>33</sup> hooks, bell, p. 269.

<sup>34</sup> By non-racism what they were projecting was a society in which race was stripped of its political & referencing function. Becoming incidental like a freckle, toe size or body hair, race would no longer be a determinant of life chances and possibilities. The subject of the meaning of non-racism and how that meaning changes from one historical context to another is an immense topic in and of itself. Historian George Frederickson at Stanford has spent much of his life doing that. His most recent book, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* is an indispensable starting point for comparatively discussing the differing objectives and strategies of the anti-racism movements in the United States and South Africa. The book also compellingly traces the history of how the two struggles have impacted and enriched one another. Especially impressive is the chapter "'Black Man, You Are On Your Own': Black Power and Black



comprehensive and well thought-out vision that I often - but not always - find woefully absent in what is articulated here in the USA. I am reminded of the address that the late Agostinho Neto gave at the University of Dar Es Salaam, in February, 1974. It was only months before the Fourth Pan Africanist Congress, a gathering dominated by a political agenda of Black nationalism and racial separatism especially emanating from the African-American delegation and certain quarters in Tanzania. Dr. Neto spoke on "Who is the Enemy? What is Our Objective?" Citing a few lines cannot convey the full depth and clarity of his lecture that afternoon but let me share the following extracts as typical of the type of informed, clear envisioning done by the Southern African leader. In this part of his talk he was addressing the Afro-American delegation who had already publicly denounced Whites participating in the Angolan liberation struggle:

I do not wish to ignore at this moment the pressure that is exerted on the liberation movements to maintain so-called *black purity*. The case of America where the racial struggle is the most apparent to the blacks, is often cited...What I am saying I do not wish to be taken as criticism of our brave black American brothers who know better than anyone how to orient their struggle...But allow me also to reject any idea on the transformation of the national liberation struggle in Angola into a racial struggle. I would say that in Angola the struggle also assumes a racial aspect since discrimination is a fact. The black man is exploited there. *But it is fundamentally a struggle against the colonial system and its chief ally, imperialism* (emphasis mine).<sup>35</sup>

Earlier in the speech Dr. Neto addressed "isolation" - the factor which I believe to be of inordinate importance in limiting the envisioning done by many people of color (and people

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Consciousness." It is unfortunate that a fuller review of this book could not be a larger part of this undertaking.

<sup>35</sup> As quoted in Braganca, Aquino and Wallerstin, Imanuel ed. *The African Liberation Reader*, Vol. 3, *The Strategy of Liberation*, p. 217.



generally) in the USA. He said:

In my opinion, the national liberation struggle in Africa cannot be disassociated from the present context in which it is taking place; it cannot be isolated from the world. A worker's strike in England, the imposition of fascism on the Chilean people or an atomic explosion in the Pacific are all phenomena of this same life that we are living and in which we are seeking ways to a happy existence for man [sic] in this world...the historical bonds between our peoples and other peoples in the world are becoming ever closer, since there can be no other trend on earth. Isolation is impossible and is contrary to the idea of technical, cultural and policial progress.<sup>36</sup>

My view is that in the USA our encounter with race and racial questions (our struggle, if you will) is first inextricably linked to and dependent upon other issues like class relations and gender relations. I think that all people need to go through stages of transformation: 1) undoing of racism<sup>37</sup>; 2) becoming anti-racist; 3) adopting non-racialism based on a heightened understanding of the various groups constituting the US mosaic.

Some people need more time to go through the stages than others. Some people bring more pieces of racist (or sexist, "classist" and/or homophobic) baggage than others as they begin the voyage. Some bring old-fashioned steamer trunks, others sleek, stream-lined backpacks. I further believe that it's all very difficult, painful, and done in fits and starts. And that it's even more challenging if those going through it are not guided by some kind of vision, some kind of ideology, some kind of faith. All of this means a particular challenge for most in the USA because of the unabated cynicism and crass negativity that is so abundant. Countering this, and ending on a more

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<sup>36</sup> IBID, p. 210.

<sup>37</sup> The recent strategy of holding conversations about race called "The Chicago Dinners" initiated by Clarence Wood and the Human Relations Foundation of Chicago could be placed at the beginning of the undoing stage.